

# 1. Believing in God

## SESSION THEMES

- God as Creator, as Father, other metaphors for God, God as Trinity
- Revelation - how do we come to know God?
- Belief and faith - how are beliefs formed?

## YOU WILL NEED

Session Handouts 1.1 to 1.5, fine coloured felt pens, Bibles, photos of Creation and/or the stars (search at <https://pexels.com>), newsprint or a whiteboard, a small mirror.

In several sessions we will be referring to *The Apostles' Creed*, *The Nicene Creed* and the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*. The Creeds are included as Handout 1.1.

We will be using quotations from the *Basis of Union*, but if you want to give people a complete copy, you can download it here - <https://resources.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012/Basis1992.pdf>

This session includes reference to the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church. This is Handout 1.4.

## 1. GATHERING (3 minutes)

Place the photos of Creation in the centre of the group.

Read Psalm 8, inviting people around the group to read a verse each, with a pause between each verse.

Invite people to look at their palms as you pray:

*God who made human hands  
and shimmering stars,  
oceans deep and mountain peaks,  
all that crawls and swims and flies*



*You are mystery to us,  
vaster than galaxies  
yet seeking relationship -  
to be at home among us.*

*You invite us to know  
whose we are and  
to whom we belong  
to live in lifelong communion  
with you.*

*We are in awe of you  
left speechless by your works  
and we worship you.  
Amen.*

## 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (10 minutes)

These six sessions are an invitation to explore Christian faith together. This is an opportunity to see faith as involving head, heart and hands. While we will explore beliefs, we will also reflect on how we live as disciples in relation to our beliefs. No doubt your beliefs have changed as you have grown and matured, just as your experience of God has matured. These sessions are an invitation to learn from our Christian tradition, including the Bible and the Creeds, and also to learn from one another.

May we agree to be open to listen to one another, to have the courage to share our questions and doubts, to live with and even learn from our differences, and in all this to listen to God's Spirit leading us to deeper faith. We believe that faith is nurtured and sustained in community, and that Christ is present among us.

In each session we will be exploring

**God's Story** - what can we learn from the Scriptures and the Creeds of the church?

**Our Story** - what can we learn from the life and faith of the church?

**My Story** - what are we discovering in our own faith and lives as Christians?

In each session we will also be watching a 7 to 8 minute video exploring an area of Christian faith from a Uniting Church perspective. [You can, if you wish, invite people to watch these at home prior to the session.]

### **Discuss**

*Where is a particular outdoor place in which you have had a deep sense of God's presence?*

*Describe the place and your experience.*

### **3. MY STORY (15-20 minutes)**

Distribute Handout 1.2 - *My Faith Journey*.

Today's session is about what we believe about God and how we come to know God. What a huge topic! We could never cover it all so instead let's uncover some of it. Let's begin with an opportunity to get to know one another better.

You're invited to reflect on how you have grown in faith and come to know God.

*What are some of the ways in which your faith has been nurtured?*

*Who has been important in that process?*

*What groups or activities were significant?*

*What places have been special in your journey?*

*What parts of the Bible have been significant?*

Take 5 to 7 minutes to write or draw in the squares on Handout 1.2 using the felt pens. And if there's something that doesn't fit one of those four areas, put it down anyway.

*In small groups of 2 or 3 people, share some of your story.*

Leaders will need to monitor the time so that it doesn't go too long and each person has an opportunity to speak. If people have many things on their sheets of paper, you could invite them to speak about one thing from each quadrant. Allow 10-15 minutes for this.

### **4. GOD'S STORY (20-25 minutes)**

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Believing in God" (Duration 6 mins 49 seconds)

Each time you watch one of the videos, encourage people to take notes if they wish.

The video covers some big themes!

- How do we come to know who God is?
- What do Christians believe about the nature of God?
- What does it mean to call God "Father?" Is this the only way to speak of God?
- What does it mean to name God as Trinity?

As a group, brainstorm two lists on newsprint or whiteboard:

1. *What are the ways that we come to know who God is?*
2. *What do you know of the characteristics or attributes of God?*

Spend some time talking about questions raised for you by the video.

### **The Creeds**

Look at Handout 1.1 together. Handout 1.2 is provided as a reference that you may choose to distribute for later reading.

*What names are given to God in the Creeds?*

## Discuss

*What names, images or metaphors for God have been important in your faith journey?*

Leaders may wish to write or draw these on a whiteboard.

## 5. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

In 2009, the Uniting Church's national Assembly adopted a revised Preamble to the church's Constitution. The Constitution had been approved for the establishment of the Uniting Church in 1997. The changes included the recognition of Australia's First Peoples, and acknowledgement of God's presence among the First Peoples and the land prior to European colonisation. The Preamble also acknowledges the injustices of colonisation. The words of the revised Preamble came from long and considered discussion with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. An important part of the Preamble is the declaration that God who created our world is always present throughout our world.

Distribute Handout 1.3. Invite people to read sections 1, 2 and 3.

## Discuss

*How does the Preamble challenge or affirm your understandings of who God is and where God has been active in the world?*

*How does this kind of belief in God challenge or affirm the way that we live today?*

*How do you see our beliefs in God as Creator, Father and Trinity in life of the church?*

*For example*

- in our worship
- in our personal prayers
- in our tending of God's Creation

*In what ways does your congregation or faith community help to shape your belief, your faith, your discipleship?*

## 6. CLOSING (3 minutes)

Place the photos from the start of the session back in the centre of the group.

Song - *God of Creation*- Handout 1.5.

These song lyrics were written to the melody for *Morning Has Broken*. You can read them or sing them as a reflection about God as Trinity. A video of the song is here: <https://vimeo.com/461406456>  
The song is published in *Deeper Water* by Craig Mitchell, Mediacom Education, 2021.

Choose a Trinitarian prayer to say together. Here is one option.

*Bless us, God the Father,  
you that have created us.*

*Bless us, God the Son,  
you that have set us free.*

*Bless us, God the Holy Spirit,  
you that make us holy.*

*O blessed Trinity,  
keep us in body, soul and spirit,  
to life eternal.*

Weimarischer Gesangbuch, 1873.

## 7. ACTION

This week you are invited to consider how our daily lives as disciples contribute to the tending of God's Creation. How does our response to God as Creator include living responsibly on the planet?

Here is an activity for you to do at home.

There is an online calculator to help your household consider what kind of impact your lifestyle has on the environment. Have a go and it and see what you discover.

<https://www.wwf.org.au/get-involved/change-the-way-you-live/ecological-footprint-calculator>

AND/OR

Take notice during worship services of what names or images for God are used and when. Talk with your minister about this.

Report back to the group next week about your activities.

## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Each week you will be invited to find time during the week to write in a journal. Over time, this will grow as a record of your faith journey.'

This week, reflect back on the session and make a note of things like

- new insights
- things you want to affirm
- questions to keep thinking about
- choices you might make
- discipleship habits or practices to develop
- connections with other people
- things you want to say to God or that God might be saying to you

## 9. REFERENCES

Leith, John (ed), *Creeds of the Churches*, John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1982.

Lochman, Jan Milic, *The Faith We Confess*, Fortres Press: Philadelphia, 1984.

*Walking Together* is a set of learning resources designed to help Uniting Church members explore the Covenant between the UCA and Aboriginal and Islander peoples. <https://assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether>

The videos feature Rev Denise Champion speaking about the revised Preamble to the Constitution. Check out Video #2 and Video #5 here - <https://vimeo.com/showcase/3459179>

Dave Williamson refers to a poem by Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners* <https://gratefulness.org/resource/a-sleep-of-prisoners/>



## ***The Apostles' Creed***

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ,  
God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## ***The Nicene Creed***

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the  
Father  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic  
and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## ***My Faith Journey***

<p>Experiences which nurtured my faith</p>	<p>Places where my faith was nurtured</p>
<p>People who nurtured my faith</p>	<p>Stories which shaped my faith</p>



## The Creeds

Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed speak of God as **Father**, God as **Creator** or **Maker** of heaven and earth, and also of God as **Trinity**.

The origin of the Apostles' Creed is unknown, but it is very similar to a creed from the theologian Hippolytus in 215 AD, and other creeds from the these first few centuries of the Christian church. By the third century, its form was fairly standard in western Europe. The Nicene Creed was approved by a council of churches in Nicea in 325 AD.

For hundreds of years both statements have been seen across mainstream Christian churches as foundational statements of faith. We may struggle with some of their ancient language today, but they have been core affirmations of Christian faith across time and place.

Have a look at the first section of each Creed. What they say about God as Father and Creator seems in one sense basic and straightforward.

But of course, in our society, many more people believe in "something out there" than attend church. Belief in a god or gods, or a sense of the sacred, is more widespread than belief in the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Creeds name a God who is known - as the sole author of Creation, as a parent of all humankind, and as Three-in-One.

So, the rather general question "What do we know or believe about God?" is first answered with "God can be known and God wants to be known!" Here we find two remarkable affirmations of Christian faith - that there is a God, Creator, beyond our comprehension, and that this God seeks intimate relationship with Creation, as a parent with his or her children.

The mystery of God, indeed, the mystery of existence, is the mystery of communion of God with all, all with God. The heart of Christian life is the encounter with a personal god who makes possible both our union with God and communion with each other.

The mystery of God is revealed to be a matter of invitation and incorporation into divine life through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; at the same time it is also invitation and incorporation into new relationship with each other, as we are gathered together by the Spirit into the body of Christ.

Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

## *The Preamble*

The Preamble to the Uniting Church's Constitution says

As the Church believes God guided it into union so it believes that God is calling it to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many lands, and as part of that to

### RECOGNISE THAT

1. When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.

2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

4. Some members of the uniting churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their well being, culture and language as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.

5. Many in the uniting churches, however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice

that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.

6. The uniting churches were largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and inter-relationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.

7. From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.

8. In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

9. In 1988 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God.

10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

AND THUS the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.



## God of Creation

Tune: "Morning Has Broken"

God of Creation  
Gentle life-giver  
Present at birth, and  
all through our days  
Author of sunrise  
Song in the night sky  
Here in this place, we  
offer our praise

Jesus, Companion  
teacher and healer  
friend of the grieving,  
suffering, the poor  
Stand with your people  
whisper among us  
promise of mercy  
goodness for all

Spirit of Comfort  
blow through Creation  
stir up new life, breathe  
peace through our world  
Healer of hearts, and  
hope for tomorrow  
weave all our sorrows  
into new dawn

Here we give thanks for  
life in its fullness  
blessings received  
your gifts to us all  
Make us a people  
filled with compassion  
selflessly giving  
serving your world